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SUBJECT: BAYELSA GOVERNOR'S ARREST STRIKES FEAR IN THE
HEARTS OF HIS PEERS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (D)

1. (C) Summary: The arrest of Bayelsa State Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha in London has unnerved some of his fellow pro-Atiku southern governors. His interception abroad, where he does not enjoy constitutional immunity, has not only sullied the attraction of frequent travel (one of the governors' favored pastimes), but is causing many of them to rethink the wisdom of backing a retreating Atiku against a surging Obasanjo. Many of them probably would have turned tail and angled toward Obasanjo but for his storied vindictiveness. They cannot be certain if, in running to him, they would not be running into his hard clutches rather than the accepting embrace of a magnanimous chief executive for his prodigal junior executives. End summary.

THE PRICE OF HIS SUCCESS

2. (C) His profligacy is part of his predicament but the Bayelsa executive is no more spendthrift than many of his colleagues. The sybaritic life has been a contagion among state governors. One of the ironies is that Alamieyeseigha has probably performed better in the past year to 18 months than many of his brethren and definitely has improved over his earlier years. Thus, in the minds of many Nigerians, Alamieyeseigha's travail did not begin in London Heathrow airport but with his temerity toward President Obasanjo. The Bayelsa governor had been one of the earliest and most visible 2007 vice-presidential aspirants, journeying around the country drumming-up, soliciting and purchasing support from any quarter for this bid. His misfortune, according to this rendition of the tale, was that he wanted to be number two to a man who just might be President Obasanjo's number one bete noire - Vice President Atiku. In backing and indirectly campaigning for Atiku, the Bayelsa executive was bound to ire Obasanjo into action against him.

3. (C) Thus Governor Alamieyeseigha apparently elevated himself on the Economic and Financial Crime Commission's (EFCC) priority list. The signs of Alamieyeseigha's impending woes were evident. The EFCC had been scouring Bayelsa financial records for weeks. Four state commissioners had been apprehended by the EFCC a week before the governor was stopped in London. Reaction in Bayelsa State to the apprehension of the quartet was swift. Militia members in Yenegoa and Port Harcourt threatened to storm EFCC offices. Governor Alamieyeseigha reportedly intervened by telephone from his hospital bed in Germany and obtained the commissioners' release, forestalling potential violence.

4. (C) Alamieyeseigha's influence with the militias was due to his policy of co-optation of militia leaders, some of whom he has given government appointments in exchange for their cooperation and their avoidance of generalized violence. This policy is a double-edged sword. While it serves to finance militia members and enable them to keep their following, it also has served to make them less violent. Whichever one's point of view might be, both the relative quiet in Bayelsa prior to the Governor's arrest and the tension subsequent to his detention have been influenced by his strategy of co-optation.

APPREHENSION SEIZES THE OTHER GOVERNORS

5. (C) In the South-South and South-East, Alamieyeseigha's arrest has sent tremors through many of the gubernatorial mansions whose primary occupants are also pro-Atiku. Many of the governors have been literally frozen in their tracks. Peripatetic governors, like Edo State's Lucky Igbinedion who seemingly spent as much time abroad as in their state capitals, suddenly have become stationary homebodies. Rumor among the southern governors is that the federal government has provided the British authorities a hit list of officials to target. Few pro-Atiku governors want to test the fates and find themselves situated with Alamieyeseigha. Predictably, tension has increased because Alamieyeseigha's arrest means the political stakes have been raised. Many of

these currently homebound governors are conferring among themselves trying to figure out Obasanjo's and their own next moves.

16. (C) Some governors will be tempted to wash their hands of Atiku and seek rapprochement with Obasanjo. However, Obasanjo's vengefulness is proverbial. Surrendering to him is no guarantee of his lenient reaction. Meanwhile, pro-Atiku hardliners are trying to circle the wagons around their embattled mentor. They cite the Bayelsa's arrest as an example of what will happen to each of them unless they stick together. Taking all this together, the political atmosphere in southern Nigeria is one of uncertainty, fog, and possible shifts in allegiances.

EFCC CHAIRMAN RIBADU'S ROLE?

17. (C) EFCC Chairman Nuhu Ribadu's role in the Alamieyeseigha drama is unclear, but he was in proximity to many of its pivotal acts. First, Ribadu apparently spoke with Alamieyeseigha during the disruption concerning the Bayelsa State commissioners. This was while the Governor was in Germany. Ribadu also reportedly visited London prior to Alamieyeseigha's arrival and subsequent detention at Heathrow. (Comment: Ribadu's London itinerary is unknown, but his visit coming so shortly in advance of the Governor's arrival is not looked on by many Nigerians as coincidental. End comment).

18. (C) Comment: Alamieyeseigha's arrest has frightened many other southern governors, who have quickly shelved their rather liberal international travel habits. These southern governors will eschew overseas travel because they fear losing the protection provided by the immunity clause of the Nigerian constitution. At bottom, these governors would not have much to worry about but for their large-scale personal liberality with public coffers. However, they all see the latest arrest as the politically motivated use of international law enforcement cooperation between Nigeria and the UK to subdue Obasanjo foes and isolate VP Atiku. They claim that Alamieyeseigha was targeted while Obasanjo allies have not been harassed although many of them are similarly culpable of like transgressions.

19. (C) Comment, continued: Thus, the arrest gives the southern governors cause to mull the pros and cons of their allegiances with Vice President Atiku as opposed to attempting to get out of the Obasanjo dog house. Whether to ally with Obasanjo or Atiku has been the existential question, and now even more so. Not only is one's political future in the balance but a governor's personal freedom or future incarceration may be determined by the selection he makes. End comment.

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